

# Militarism at Work in Belgium and Germany

BY  
K. G. OSSIANNILSSON

TRANSLATED BY  
H. G. WRIGHT, M.A.

LONDON  
T. FISHER UNWIN LTD.  
ADELPHI TERRACE



*With the Compliments*  
*of*  
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# MILITARISM AT WORK IN BELGIUM AND GERMANY

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROCLAMATION CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT

IN the middle of October, in the year 1916 after the birth of Christ, the following proclamation was put up on the walls of the houses in every Belgian commune—

#### “NOTICE

concerning certain improvements in the poor-law administration and concerning the help required to be given in case of general misfortune.

#### 1.

“Persons able to work can be compelled by force to do so, even outside their

domicile, in case they are obliged, on account of idleness, drunkenness, loafing, unemployment or indolence, to have recourse to the charity of others for the maintenance of themselves or their family.

2.

“ Every inhabitant of the country is under an obligation to render aid in case of misfortune or general danger, and as far as in him lies to find a remedy for the general misfortune, even outside his domicile; in case he refuses he can be compelled by force.

3.

“ Whosoever, on being ordered to work according to §§ 1 and 2, refuses to perform or continue the work assigned him, will be punished with not more than three years' imprisonment and fined not more than 10,000 marks, or if it is thought fit

one of these penalties may be inflicted, provided that the laws now in force do not admit of more rigorous penalties.

“ If the refusal to work is made in concert or in agreement with several persons, each accomplice will be sentenced, as if he had been the ringleader, to at least one week’s imprisonment.

4.

“ Cases herewith connected will be tried by the German administrative and judicial military authorities.

“ VON SAUBERZWEIG,

*Quartermaster-General.*

“ *General Headquarters,*  
*October 3rd, 1916.*”

If the meaning of this mysterious proclamation was not immediately clear to everybody, it became so within a very short time. The German military authorities demanded of the mayors or other

magistrates the lists of persons receiving support on account of unemployment.

*Now it is to be noted—*

(1) That these lists include (according to an approximate estimate) one-third of the able-bodied male population of Belgium;

(2) That the persons receiving relief were thrown out of work and needed relief on account of the war and the seizure by the Germans of factories, rolling stock, raw materials and manufactured products;

(3) That it is not the Germans, but the Belgians themselves, as well as Americans, Swiss, Dutchmen, Spaniards and Scandinavians, who maintain the unemployed; and

(4) That the Belgian authorities for combating unemployment had started relief work such as road-making and the like, but were *commanded by the Germans*

*to cease*—lest the funds of the communes should be unnecessarily burdened.

For these reasons the Belgian mayors refused to hand over the required lists to the Germans. The result was the same everywhere: the arrest of officials and heavy fines to be paid out of the communal funds.

At Bruges (in Flemish, Brugge, in German Brügge) the mayor was Count Amédée Visart de Bocarmé, a member of parliament, and an old man of eighty. But he was not easily perturbed. When the Germans arrived, in 1914, they opened the conversation by putting a Browning revolver to the old man's forehead. He replied: "I know that you can kill me, but—may I request that in view of my age it should be done as politely as possible?"

The Germans now appeared for the second time, perhaps without revolver on

this occasion, and demanded the relief lists. The mayor refused. Thereupon he was arrested, declared to be dismissed and replaced by Lieutenant Rogge of Schwerin. The town of Bruges was required to pay a fine of 100,000 marks daily, until the lists were handed over.

Every attempt to refuse any demand whatsoever of Belgium's amiable guests merely affords a welcome opportunity for fresh extortion. For a long time Belgium has been paying a war tax of 40,000,000 francs a month, and this monthly tax has recently been raised to 50,000,000 francs. This in a country where one-third of the able-bodied male population has hitherto been in receipt of relief !

But it is true it was this latter evil that the Germans in their kindness wished to remedy.

Without further parley they therefore seized these lists, which bore witness to

the charitableness of Europe and America and to the beneficent activity of Germany in Belgium. And in accordance with these lists all able-bodied and unemployed men were ordered to appear at a public building at a certain hour, ready to depart—to Germany!

Exempt from the order were hunchbacks, lame and one-armed persons, and teachers, doctors, priests and lawyers.

All the rest had to appear, for—this was the reason given—it was to be feared that otherwise they might some day become a burden to the communes. Lest this danger—which on account of the charitableness of America and of non-German Europe did not then exist—should some day become a reality, the Germans now undertook to force the able-bodied to work in factories and mines in Germany.

Of course, they gave the assurance that it should not be for work which is forbidden

by international law: that is, work for German war purposes. But just at present—in the times of civilian mobilisation—it would seem difficult to find any work in Germany which is not connected with the war and its purposes. In any case these Belgian workmen would naturally *release* a corresponding number of German workmen, who could proceed to the Front instead. The three hundred and fifty thousand Belgians who were to be deported to Germany would thus provide Germany with an army of three hundred and fifty thousand men, or seven entire army corps.

The fact is that Germany is “beginning” to run short of recruits, which is undeniably a *misfortune* for Germany—and it is this “*general*” *misfortune*, which Belgium, according to the Hague Conventions, is said to be under an obligation to remedy !



Out of gratitude for this service Germany frees Belgium from the paupers to whom Belgium might in the future have to look forward. Germany—foreseeing as usual—takes *preventive* measures against poverty in Belgium.

In the same way, as early as August 1914, Germany took *preventive* measures against the invasion of Belgium. To protect Belgium against invasion by wicked neighbours—Germany herself invaded the ungrateful country.

And Germany has long dealt with her own citizens in the same way. By the so-called Preventive Arrest (*Schutzhaft*) Law any person whatsoever—though absolutely innocent—may be imprisoned by way of *prevention*. The State thereby *protects* him against the consequences of the crimes he might otherwise commit!!

## CHAPTER II

### BELGIAN WORKMEN SENT TO GERMANY

THEREFORE—

“Commune X..... No.....  
on October 16, 1916, at 8 a.m., X. has to  
appear at the school (barracks, etc.),  
provided with : 1 head-covering, 1 neck-  
cloth, 1 waistcoat, 1 pair of trousers, 1 pair  
of boots or shoes, 2 shirts, 2 pairs of socks,  
2 pairs of drawers, 1 coat, 1 pair of gloves,  
1 waterproof rug (can serve as waterproof  
overcoat), 1 towel, 1 mess-tin, 1 spoon,  
knife and fork, 2 blankets.

“You may provide yourself with money.

“Failure to appear will be punished  
with imprisonment or other loss of liberty  
amounting to not more than three years  
*and* with a fine of not more than 10,000  
marks *or* with one of these penalties.

“X—., C.O.”

The German sense of order must always manifest itself. The workmen, who appear laden with all the above, must be considered very well, if not luxuriously equipped. Simple, but substantial. What is lacking—soap and tooth-brush, for instance, of which no mention is made—can presumably be obtained on arriving in Germany. For one is provided with money.

Only one question: can the persons belonging to the working classes, who possess all the above in good condition, and money to make everything complete, can they be described as future paupers? Can the refractory one, who pays a fine of 10,000 marks, be thought in danger of becoming a burden to the commune—in case he is not required to pay the fine? Before the war 10,000 marks in inexpensive Belgium meant a whole fortune.

German logic seems at times somewhat

undeveloped. However, "*Not hat kein Gebot*,"<sup>1</sup> necessity does away with even the laws of logic. And in practice the German always makes himself clear and comprehensible.

On his arrival at the meeting-place the slave . . . I beg pardon, workman in question is asked if he will voluntarily undertake to work in Germany, in which case he has to sign a number of papers, certifying that it is voluntary.

If the workman signs, he is immediately sent off to Germany. Trains stand in readiness. The usual traffic is—for the benefit of the Belgians—very considerably restricted.

If the workman does not sign, and in most cases, ungrateful as he is, he refuses, then he is exposed to such treatment as is described in the following chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Necessity knows no law (Translator's note).

## CHAPTER III

### LETTERS FROM DEPORTED BELGIANS

THREE letters, published in the Dutch newspaper *Telegraaf* at Amsterdam, on November 5, 1916. The first is from two sons to their parents, living in a village in the district of Ghent, where large numbers of arrests were made.

“When we had been led out of the village, we steered our course for Ghent, where about eleven in the evening we halted outside the *Vooruit Palace*. The Germans took our identity cards from us and locked us in the banqueting hall.

“Next morning at ten o'clock each of us was given water and a piece of sour bread without fat; at two o'clock we received the same ration, and at 7 p.m.

we were treated in the same way. This was our bill of fare for *the first three* days. *But it is not in this way that they will induce us to sign.*

“On Wednesday night at half-past eleven a voice shouted, ‘Die Leute von X . . . hier kommen!’ (The men from X. come here !)

“We thought that we were to be sent to prison, where we ought to be better off than here. When we had got outside, we saw we were surrounded by two lines of soldiers, who took us to the *Plezante-Vest* factory, where we are still.

“We arrived here at one o’clock in the morning, and had to lie on sacks of straw full of vermin.

“Next morning at nine o’clock we were given acorn tea to drink, but we got no bread; at 1 p.m. we were at last allowed to eat our fill of soup; after this meal we felt so drowsy and limp that we all

stretched ourselves for an hour on our sacks of straw. The evening meal consisted of a little bad coffee and bread.

“The hunger test continues. But we assure you, father and mother, that we will never sign. We said so in the village assembly room, we are and remain good patriots. We do not know yet when we shall leave here. We are in good spirits; do not worry about us ! The Germans will not succeed in breaking us. Our will is the will of the Yser.” (An allusion to the battle of the Yser; in Flemish Yzer also means “iron.”)

. . . . .

The second letter is from a workman to his employer.

“For a whole week now we have been holding out against the Germans, and we still hope to remain firm in our resolution.

“It would be very cowardly of us to work

for the enemy and thus prolong the war. We are absolutely agreed on this point.

“We are here to the number of two thousand three hundred. The Germans will not be able to bend us; we have no right to enjoy a happier lot than our brothers at the Front, who are fighting and suffering for us. We cannot take a step without the Germans being at our heels with rifle and bayonet. Kindly ask them at home to send me some clothes, for the weather is beginning to be cold.

“They say here that the Germans intend to compel us to work; I think this shows lack of taste. Remember me to all and keep your own spirits up! The hour of liberty will strike some day.”

. . . . .

The third letter was written by a young man who was detained at the office of inspection (*Meldeamt*) just when he came to present himself as usual.



“Father,” he writes; “when I was marching through the street, I saw you and nodded. Perhaps you found it strange that I did not shake hands. But no doubt you will understand why I did not do so. It is wisest to obey the Germans, as long as they do no violence to one’s conscience.

“When we arrived here in the building and were told that we were to sign, there was such an outburst of shouts, protests and hooting that the people outside must have heard it, I am sure. That was our only reply.”

This letter also contains painful details concerning the wretched diet of civilian prisons.

. . . . .

All this brave endurance is, however, in vain. Sooner or later this resistance must be overcome, for sooner or later the Germans have recourse to their favourite method: bodily violence. By

force the starving men are driven to the railway station, by force they are dragged into the compartments. Soldiers separate them by force from their relatives. In some places the wives of workmen throw themselves in front of the trains and are driven away at the point of the bayonet or with the butt-end of a rifle.

Of course, the promises that exceptions will be made in the case of certain classes are not kept. At Mons, amongst others, a *teacher, aged fifty-five*, was dragged off, without warning and without his family being informed. And he ought surely to be regarded as too old to begin his apprenticeship to industry.

But there is a connected account by an eye-witness from the little town of Nivelles, in the Walloon part of Belgium—in the smallest town or village those who spread German “Kultur” set up a slave-market.

This is how it takes place !

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MEN OF NIVELLES AND DISTRICT

ON Wednesday, November 8, at eight o'clock in the morning, the whole male population of Nivelles, over seventeen years of age, was assembled in the *Place Saint-Paul*. Little by little, at intervals of a few minutes, we saw the men of Lillois, Tines, Montreux, Baulers, Bonnival, Ittre, Haut-Ittre and Virginal arrive, each group headed by its mayor. They, too, had been summoned to appear there.

“At a quarter past eight the roll-call began. The officers spoke German and their words were translated by an interpreter. First came Nivelles itself. The names of the old men over seventy-five years of age were read out, then the names of those aged seventy, and so on,

five years at a time, until the men of fifty-five were reached.

“Whilst the rain poured down we saw them march past the officers, who stamped the identity cards of all this melancholy assembly of aged paupers. Many were unable to walk without crutches or without the support of a relative’s arm; others literally dragged themselves along, tortured by all kinds of pains. This group was immediately released.

“Then all between fifty and fifty-five years of age were called aside. These left St. Paul’s Square, surrounded by soldiers with rifles hanging from their shoulders and followed by the officials of the local railways.

“After this handful there marched the whole male population of Nivelles, drawn up in ranks three by three, according to age, and flanked by German soldiers. The mournful procession moved through

Town Hall Street, through the suburbs and along the Brussels road to the large Delcroix paper factories.

“All side-streets leading to this road were carefully guarded. The foremost ranks walked in quiet and silence, but the last, those of the young men, marched with regular step to the tunes of the *Marseillaise* and the *Brabançonne*, which the soldiers did not dare to forbid.

“The women and children, who, at the tramp of feet, hastened out of their doors, were sobbing, for they believed that all these men were already being taken to the railway station and thence God knows where.

“At the Delcroix factories the selection was made. At the porter's lodge stood a German soldier, who repeated incessantly: “Anybody who is ill or injured must say so and present himself for examination. Doctors Lavand'homme

and Froment were there and certified in the presence of German officers, who no doubt were also doctors, that they had treated this man or that. The sick were put aside.

“But there a first batch of twenty-five men are taken into a room, where three officers have seated themselves at a table. The latter demand to see their identity cards and question them one at a time. According to their orders the men have to go to this side or that. Those who are declared unfit for the purposes of the Germans put their cards, which the officers have stamped, in their pockets.

“Then they are taken to the exit. Outside a patrol of soldiers accompanies those who have been declared free, as far as the next patrol, which, in its turn, accompanies them, and so on, until the streets that are not barricaded are reached.

“Very different was the procedure with those detained inside. Their cards were

taken from them and they were given a number. The unfortunate men who were thus marked off were frequently unaware of what had been decided in their case. Some of them, who were neither unemployed nor workmen, applied to M. Delcroix, the mayor, who, with admirable zeal, pleaded their cause with the Germans.

“When a certain number of men who had received a number had been separated from the rest, they were taken into an adjoining room. And there the canvassing began. With smiling countenance officers asked those selected: ‘Will you work for us? You are a filer, a carpenter, a stove-maker; we offer you high wages, so many marks a day. You will have your bread for the duration of the war: you and your wife and your little children have suffered long enough. Come now, you are a sensible fellow, just sign that contract and then you can go home and

pack. You need not start for a few days and you need not even leave Belgian territory.' And an energetic refusal followed. The men grew pale for a moment and replied firmly: 'I will not sign, I will not work against my country.' Many protested against the violence used in their case and declared that they were not workmen, nor did they lack employment. But it was trouble thrown away.

"In the meantime, the few citizens who were allowed to go where they wished took great pains to rescue this man or that from those chosen. But the Germans remained deaf to all eloquence. Thus thirteen employees of the local railways were carried off in spite of the protests of their superiors. Similarly the Germans got into their clutches M. Chantrenne, director of the famous metal-works at Nivelles. Finally he escaped with great difficulty and after a long discussion.



Many, too, were those who could not be classed as manual labourers and who wished to continue their work, but were nevertheless compelled to accompany the rest.

“ Small manufacturers, tradesmen, master-mechanics, farmers, students, men of means, and here and there even people who were not quite sound in their mind were carried off. No consideration restrained the Germans, they were not even ashamed to march off with Gobert the painter, the father of eleven children, and with him his two eldest sons.

“ About half-past nine the first batch were stowed away in a railway carriage, which had been shunted to just opposite the factory. Eight men were placed in each compartment, whereupon the doors were carefully locked. Many of those who were now sent to Germany had had no idea that they were to be sent away

and had provided themselves with neither food nor linen. All those who had been released and had made preparations for this mass deportation fraternally handed over their knapsack or their bundle to those locked in the carriages. Some even took off their overcoats and gave them to the unfortunate men.

“One carriage after the other was drawn up and each was filled with compulsory recruits.

“In the town the excitement was enormous. The men who returned home told the families here of the departure of husband or father, there of brothers or sons. With feverish haste the women packed food and other necessities for the journey into exile. Then they hastened like madwomen, with the anguish of death in their hearts, to the railway station. There, four or five at a time, they were allowed to approach the carriages, to

hand over their light parcel and to say a hasty farewell, whilst each moment from some carriage or other there echoed the *Brabançonne*. During the whole journey the people in the neighbouring villages hastened to bring help to the exiles.

“At midday the Germans interrupted their work to go and dine, and did not resume until an hour and a half later. As a result of this the men of Baulers, who had arrived at St. Paul’s Square, Nivelles, at ten o’clock, had to wait there until half-past three in the rain, which poured down all day. No consideration was shown to the more aged amongst them.

“The whole afternoon a few self-sacrificing citizens, and particularly the mayors of the various communes, endeavoured to save one or the other of their fellow-townsmen or fellow-villagers. After regular wrestling at times, they succeeded in snatching from the clutches of the zealous

Germans a few men, whose removal would have been too shameful an injustice.

“One citizen of Nivelles, M. Tombeur, who was moved by so much misery, carried his generosity so far as to present from five to ten marks to each of those who lacked money.

“In this manner, face to face with the tragedy then being enacted, the Belgians once more bore witness loudly and proudly to their patriotism and their sense of brotherhood.

“About half-past five the train was filled. It had no less than thirty-two carriages. Nivelles alone had been deprived of nearly a thousand men, who had been selected haphazard and the majority of whom would leave their relatives in a misery which they had hitherto succeeded in warding off.

“When the train began to move in the direction of Ottignies, a cry resounded from many throats : ‘ Long live the King !

Long live Belgium ! Long live France !' And on all sides they struck up simultaneously the *Brabançonne* and the *Marseillaise*. Women and children, all who were able to follow the train along the line, sobbed in despair, with death in their hearts, and greeted again, for the last time, their kinsmen, who departed so bravely.

"A number of Germans felt such pride at having reduced so many Belgians to slavery that they marched round the streets and at the top of their voices sang *Gloria, Victoria*, at the same moment as the wives and mothers were returning to their forlorn homes. It is to be observed that this song had not been heard at Nivelles for many months.

"The reign of terror over the population, ever since the deportation, has been such that at Virginal the son of a wheelwright hanged himself, and in several places many men have been taken ill."

The witness—who himself succeeded in escaping—has given the Christian names, surnames and occupations of thirty-seven workmen who were not out of work, but were carried off by the Germans, amongst them being five men-servants and gardeners' assistants and a barber's assistant. Similarly he has recorded forty-two men who were neither manual labourers nor unemployed, but were deported with the mass of the male population. In this list we find names of tradesmen, innkeepers, students, men of means, provision dealers, farmers, tenants, draughtsmen, officials, and even the son of the owner of a manor-house in the neighbourhood.

This very restrained description might be completed by much more sensational accounts. In conclusion, just one statement from the *Telegraaf* for December 7, 1916—

“From the Walloon commune of Dour, in Hainault, one hundred and thirty-seven workmen had been deported, of whom one hundred and seventeen had been torn from their work. Of the remaining twenty—all scarcely seventeen years of age—four were students!”

\* \* \*

This is what has been called a crime, a new *slave-trade*! The slave-trade which, extirpated by the English, and, indeed, by all civilised peoples, has been revived by the *Kultur*-men of Germany!

Slave-trade! Not at all! How can one believe the Germans capable of anything like that? *Schiller's nation a nation of slave-dealers?*

Do you not see that it is all merely a new miracle of the world-famed German organisation? *Organisation* has long been the “Germanic” word for *slavery*!

## CHAPTER V

### MORE EVIDENCE FROM SWEVEGHEM AND ELSEWHERE

It would be tempting to reproduce from the Report of the Belgian Commission, vol. ii. p. 78 (Berger-Levrault, Paris), an account of what happened at Sweveghem (West Flanders) as far back as June 1915. But I must think of space.

It is a fact that the Germans are right when they point out that Belgian workmen have long been toiling on behalf of Germany. What is new in these present deportations of slaves is that they are sent wholesale to German territory. On Belgian soil slavery has long been going on in the service of Germany. And Belgian workmen have long been made use of for such work as directly helps on the war,



and is absolutely contrary to international law.

The workmen of Sweveghem were compelled to make wire for the Germans. They were forced to do so by means of blows and such ill-treatment that they fell unconscious, or at times revolvers were levelled at their heads. Their wages had to be paid out of the funds of the commune of Sweveghem. When the mayor refused, revolvers were raised against him. Those who absolutely refused to work were carried off to Germany—that is, deportation, which has been in force ever since the beginning of the war, only not on such a scale as now.

The Germans have not even scrupled to tear away the warders of asylums from their charges. A Belgian who succeeded in escaping to Holland describes his adventures in the *Telegraaf* on October 22, 1916.

“ During the month of May last twenty-one of my colleagues, warders at the lunatic asylum of Evcre, and myself received orders from the German military authorities to look after wounded Germans at Schaerbeck. We refused, because we could not leave our own patients. We were imprisoned in one of the buildings of the military command. We were allowed to sleep on the matter until next morning, when we were given the choice between complete submission to the orders of the military authorities and deportation to Germany. We persisted in our refusal. Next day we were taken to the camp of Holzminden, in Germany, and as soon as we arrived, ordered to work in an *ammunition factory* at Duisburg. We refused to obey this order also. Then we were compelled for the next three days to stand upright against a wall from sunrise until six o'clock in the evening, whilst we were

forbidden to allow ourselves the least rest ; we had to consume in a standing posture the scanty meals offered us. If we tried to move or to speak, the soldiers recalled us to order with blows from the butts of their rifles. Finally we had to give in. I worked at Duisburg until the opportunity to flee presented itself. I managed to get on foot to the Dutch frontier. At Groesbeek I learnt that I was free."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SO-CALLED "VOLUNTARY" BELGIAN WORKMEN IN GERMANY

THIS last event consequently took place before the order of October 1916. In the case of the mass deportations which then followed, the German authorities pointed to the many Belgians who were already working *voluntarily* in Germany. Bearing the above in mind, we know the nature of this voluntary labour. We know also how the Germans respect their promise not to force people to do work contrary to international law.

In Belgium itself, that is *under the eyes of those* who have now been enticed, inveigled or compelled to do "voluntary work" in Germany—in Belgium itself

work by civilian Belgian prisoners has long been going on contrary to international law.

“The labourers”—we read in a Belgian newspaper in Holland—“whom the Germans have got at work round about Antwerp and near the Dutch frontier *at the new system of defence*, you know, are not allowed to return home after they have finished their work. Others are permitted to see their families again when they have done serving the enemy. But the men who have worked at the trenches must accept other work of the same kind and thenceforward renounce all communication with their relatives, except to send them just a line and their pay, entire or docked, for the maintenance of the family. If the workman refuses to accept this condition, which is quite natural, seeing that he did not expect this point in the contract, he is sent to Germany, where the

severity of the starvation camps soon cures him of his taste for independence."

And the tractable will not have a bad time of it at all—on the contrary. They have "good lodgings and free medical attendance and a wage of thirty pfennige per working day. Foremen receive fifty pfennige. This wage can be increased by diligence and zeal for the work."

Thus if a Belgian workman consents to make cartridges and gas-bombs to be used against his countrymen in the trenches, he receives almost literally, though not in value, the thirty "pence" which were once fixed as the wage of Judas.

Thirty pfennige—that is, threepence halfpenny a day—to betray one's country, one's comrades and humanity. In places the pay nominally amounts to several marks, but all kinds of deductions finally reduce it to pfennige. A clogger from La Clinge, the father of ten children, was sent,

along with his son, aged eighteen, to the *Krupp works at Essen*. Their wage did not suffice to buy their wretched food, still less to keep the family.

One may marvel or not that Belgian workmen, who had been carried off by force from their homes and starved for three days, perhaps seven, before they were thrown into a railway-carriage, did not yield even when on the way to Germany. From the windows of the compartment it happens at times that they throw out a scrap of a letter like this—

“Voor de Duitschers werken, nooit, of nog veel min onze naam op papier zetten! Leve Albert, Koning der Belgen!” (Work for the Germans—never! And still less sign our names on the contract! Long live Albert, King of the Belgians!)

But one can well understand that the people in a village, at the approach of

the uhlans should flee to the last man and hide in fields, thickets and ditches, till the enemy—who perhaps that time have no business in *that* village—have passed, laughing.

And it is comprehensible that numerous Belgians, despising death, try to find safety across the Dutch frontier. Most of them end in the electric wire of the barrier, where electrocution brings their lives to a close. A merciful fate compared with what awaits them in Germany !



## CHAPTER VII

### THE EXPERIENCES OF A BELGIAN SAILOR

OF this fate an account is given by a Belgian sailor, Theophile Goethals, who has escaped from captivity in Germany.

Born in 1895 near Ghent, he had on July 4, 1914, shipped on board a German vessel, the *Gertrud*, belonging to a company at Stettin. After various voyages the steamer happened to be at Hamburg during the early days of August 1914. On August 11, after he had received his pay, he was discharged and, provided with a letter of introduction from the Spanish consul, he set off towards the Dutch frontier. At Bentheim he was stopped as an enemy subject, and on the pretext of his being a spy was put in the local prison along with other fellow-

countrymen and with members of the allied nations.

After fifteen days' confinement he was sent to Hanover, where he received a month's imprisonment near the Rüsselager Camp, remaining there until January 1915.

Goethals complains of those in command of the camp, who do not content themselves with plundering the prisoners of all they possess, but dismiss every request with blows and avail themselves of the most paltry causes to ill-treat them.

One fine day, all the prisoners who seemed fairly strong were sent to the salt-mines at Hanover, where the work was especially hard. After a few weeks of this occupation Goethals tried to escape. He got almost as far as the Dutch frontier; his flight was favoured by the presence of numerous fugitives from the east of France, whom he joined. Unfortunately

he was caught at Bentheim; he was put in prison and then sent to the camp of Holzminden. Goethals describes the brutal treatment to which the prisoners are exposed for the slightest offence, and he complains also of the wretched diet.

Those prisoners who desire it may work in some industry. Goethals was sent to Herrenweek, near Lübeck, to work at an iron-works. When the unfortunate men were sent off, they were told that they would be allowed to enjoy their liberty and that they would also receive wages; however, they had to toil at the hardest work under the eyes of guards who assaulted them. Goethals made a new attempt to escape. In the company of three compatriots he got as far as Kiel, where they were captured. After several weeks' cells he was sent to the camp at Güstrow, in Mecklenburg.

Goethals tells how in this camp prisoners

were fastened to a whipping-post for insignificant offences. There were four such poles, always occupied by delinquents. With their feet dangling in the air they hung there for more than two hours at a time, kept in this position only by ropes, which hurt them terribly; afterwards they had often to lie stretched out for a whole day to recover.

Goethals likewise declares that in March he witnessed the arrival of two convoys of French prisoners, about six hundred altogether, who came from the Verdun front and were exposed to the harshest treatment; they received blows, were struck with the butt-end of rifles, and had to submit to all conceivable kinds of ill-treatment.

It was also during his stay in the camp of Güstrow that Goethals was a witness of one of the numerous attempts on the part of the Germans to sow dissension amongst

the Flemish and Walloon prisoners, by trying to bring about a separatist movement amongst the Flemings. However, this attempt was a complete failure. The Germans had advised a few Flemish soldiers to get transferred to the camp of Göttingen, where, so they said, the Flemings would be better treated, get more food and so on . . . and at the same time they advised these favoured ones to carry on propaganda amongst their Flemish compatriots for political separation and for "the maintenance of the rights of the Flemings."

About seventy men, who could not quite make out what they were really required to do, accepted the proposal, and were sent together to Göttingen. But on the way five of the more intelligent and energetic amongst them, who had decided to thwart the German calculations, succeeded in making it clear to their comrades

that it was not a movement of the Flemings at all, but a demonstration which the Germans would turn to *their* advantage. They arrived at Göttingen and the demonstration proved a complete fiasco. The five prisoners who were suspected of having influenced their comrades were sent back to Güstrow and were able on their return to tell of the infamous work for which the Germans had intended to use them. The Germans understood that nothing was to be done in this way and did not persist in their efforts.

At the beginning of April 1916, Goethals, like all civilian prisoners still at the camp of Güstrow, was sent to Holzminden. He only spent fifteen days in the camp; he soon agreed to work at a glass factory in Oldenburg, hoping that with the scanty wages he received he could buy what was lacking in the diet at Holzminden. He describes the wretched quality and the

insufficiency of the food given the prisoners at Holzminden. *For those who do not receive parcels from abroad it is impossible to exist.* They cannot even buy in the camp what they lack.

The unfortunate Goethals did not gain by the change. In the factory where he worked the treatment was very harsh. The food was scarcely better, and it was almost impossible to buy food outside. In six weeks he had lost six and a half pounds in weight; his health became worse and worse; he resolved to try and escape once more, and this time he succeeded. After walking for five days and five nights he reached the Danish frontier. He was in safety.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EFFECT OF THE DEPORTATIONS ON NEUTRAL COUNTRIES

FROM this example—which, to judge by many accounts, is typical—the fate of the thousands of deported men can be pictured. They will be exposed to the same harsh treatment as other civilian prisoners. They will be starved, maltreated and influenced to betray their country. Flemings will be egged on against Walloons, Belgians against their allies. By means of starvation, oppression, assault and torture the brave sons of Belgium will be driven to work—not only in salt-works or other “civil” factories, but to work in iron-works, where cannon, shells, rifles and other implements of destruction are made, to be used against



the Belgians and their allies. Finally—sooner or later—detachments of the new crowd of prisoners will be hurled on to the front, where they will have to dig trenches and make foundations for cannon in the midst of a rain of English, French and Belgian projectiles. As wretched traitors to their country, their nation and the future of humanity, they will fall by their countrymen's bullets—whilst cynical Germans laugh mockingly at their fate.

This anticipated procedure has already been put into practice in some places. According to reports of December 16, 1916, there were in the communes of Z. and C. (not named more precisely for military reasons), in the department of the Aisne occupied by the Germans, 500 and 5000 Belgians respectively, who were already occupied in or intended for military work. In the neighbourhood of Cambrai 400 Belgians were ordered to fell trees in the

forest of Avrincourt, which is often exposed to the fire of the Entente troops. To compel them to perform this work they were subjected to revolting treatment. They were stripped naked, exposed to cold and starvation and made to sleep in mud. Not all can stand this treatment. Whole carriages full of Belgian invalids, some dying, others suffering from consumption, have been sent to their native place, from the prisoners' camp at Soltau, amongst others.

The feelings which such plans and such acts arouse in other nations, especially amongst all neutrals, can easily be imagined. Every one who has not yet become an animal must revolt at this horrible violation of all human worth. Such wholesale inveigling of people to treason must appear especially ignoble when we consider that patriotism now seems to be the only feeling which has

ideal and practical justification in the eyes of the Germans. “Deutschland über alles !” For the fatherland everything must be dared, everything done. And this blind patriotism does not see nor recognise the same feeling and the same virtue in the peoples whom the Germans trample under foot. These *Vaterländer* for whom *Deutschland* corresponds to the *Allah il Allah* of the Turks and Arabs, these Germans who for the sake of Germany have ceased to be human beings, they cannot and will not understand that others just as necessarily must be French, English and Belgian.

By such contempt for mankind and by such warfare the Germans make themselves isolated—as isolated as those inhabitants of the wilds whom one is only willing to meet when they are on the other side of the bars of a cage.

In anguish—an anguish which does not

in the least resemble the awestruck reverence that the Germans desired to inspire—in anguish both great and small nations are already protesting. The newspapers of all colours in the Scandinavian countries are for once unanimous in expressing disapproval. Even those who before saw nothing but hypocrisy in all criticism of the Germans are now discovering that they have a heart which can be moved. Yet this newspaper criticism seems ineffective, and it is a long way to a more vigorous protest in official form. But as a Scandinavian one has learnt during this war to be modest on behalf of one's own nation.

Hitherto, perhaps, only Brazil has done its obvious duty as a state to protest against the treatment of the Belgians, though the United States, Holland, Spain and others have now, as often before, made representations through their rulers or through influential bodies. Nay, the disapproba-

tion has even reached Germany itself and thence the countries of her allies. The Hungarian newspaper *Nepszawa*, appearing at Budapest, publishes an article headed "Væ Victis," in which we read, amongst other things—

"Mechanical skill, and especially qualified mechanical skill, is for the moment a more important factor than usual, and as it must be obtained where it can be obtained, Belgium has had to suffer in accordance with the old saying which always holds good: *Væ victis* (woe to the vanquished). In Poland mechanical skill and the arms which exist there are mobilised under 'the glorious and fortunate banners of Poland,' in Belgium under 'the banner of necessity.' "

Further on we read: "The question remains: for what kind of work will the Germans use the Belgians?" The paper declares *that every kind of work in Germany*

*is war work, whether it is called agricultural or industrial work.* “As the deported Belgians have not given their consent, their use is contrary to international law, and the policy of the Germans in Belgium and Poland is equally to be deplored. Instead of aiming at bringing us nearer peace, it serves to embitter our opponents and to arouse more hatred towards us amongst the neutrals. Many times and more and more we have had occasion to observe *that the neutrals show more sympathy for Belgium than for any other belligerent.*”

German Social-Democrats have also protested, but they are, it is true, only voices here and there. The majority of Bebel's powerful party has during this war covered itself with ineffaceable ignominy. The little phalanx which has gathered round Liebknecht fights an unequal fight, if it can be called a fight to protest

impotently against what nevertheless continually takes place.

Why has German Liberalism proved such an utter failure? Why is a double quartet allowed to sing the part which ought to resound with the full force of a massed choir? Is everything hypnotised by militarism? Is Germany so "united" in wrongdoing as we are made to fear and believe?

No, alas! there are forces down in the depths, but forces that are paralysed. There is a massed choir which would, no doubt, strike up, if only the baton were raised. But this baton is not raised. One by one disappears, one by one of those who might be supposed capable of acting as conductor. They disappear—whither?

Yes, ask the prisons—and the trenches! Ask the heads of militarism! They could reply, but they will probably not reply. However, quite recently light has been

thrown on a number of horrible conditions in Germany. And as these conditions explain "German unity," the attitude of the German working classes to the war and *also the German treatment of prisoners*, this exposure must have a chapter to itself here.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE PREVENTIVE ARREST LAW IN GERMANY

ON October 28, 1916, the Social-Democrat Dittmann spoke in the Reichstag against the state of siege now existing in Germany. In particular he criticised the so-called *Schutzhaftgesetz*, of which mention has already been made. A law which, so to speak, gives expression to the state of siege, and which is interpreted by the minister Helfferich as a *safeguard for the arrested individual against the temptation to commit a criminal offence!*

“Preventive arrest,” said Dittmann, “is now merely a means to crush the opposition parties and those persons who are in political opposition. Even in May preventive imprisonment had created a

regular reign of terror, which has become worse since then. The laws of 1848, the year of revolution, and the law against Socialists have been revived: nay, the system of espionage and denunciation has been restored and, as in the period of the Socialist Law, all kinds of baseness conceals itself here under the mask of patriotism.

“To an Alsatian victim a military chief of police openly admitted the drawbacks of the system: ‘In reality more than one person makes use of this opportunity to get rid of a friend.’ Rascality and the mob are at this moment celebrating veritable triumphs.” (Here the speaker was called to order.) The victims, who are quite defenceless, must put up with everything. They are subjected to treatment unworthy of a human being, whilst their livelihood and that of their families is sapped away. And they incur this frightful lot because no criminal acts which

have been really committed can be proved against them : in comparison with these preventive victims the real criminals are in an enviable position. For the situation of the preventive victims, equally terrible from the moral and from the material point of view, for the position of those under preventive arrest the members of the Government do not seem to have a spark of comprehension.

“ In the *Mehring case*, Herr Helfferich replied in all innocence to the Budget Committee : ‘ *After all, it is better that Mehring should be undergoing preventive imprisonment than that he should be free and able to commit an act for which he must be punished.*’ According to this logic every one ought to be arrested that he might be protected in this way against his own future infringements of the law. Herr Helfferich’s idea seems to be a *national house of correction for Germany*.

“ Mehring himself energetically rejects such benevolent guardianship on the part of the State and is at any time prepared to answer for his doings.

“ The Mehring case is a gauge of how near we are to Herr Helfferich’s ideal. Mehring lies in prison <sup>1</sup> because in an intercepted letter to the deputy Herzfeld he expressed himself in favour of a peace demonstration in the Potsdamer Platz, and because he offered to write an official invitation to this meeting; that is all that could be brought against him. He has, therefore, not committed any criminal act. But for these words in a letter the arrest was made of a man over seventy years of age ! How long will it be before penalties are also imposed on *thoughts* in Germany ?

“ Mehring is one of our most brilliant historians and authors. He belongs to the

<sup>1</sup> He has now been elected as member for Potsdam in succession to Lieb knecht (Translator’s note).

foremost men amongst German scholars at the present day, and as such he is known far beyond the frontiers of Germany.

“ When people abroad hear that such a man has been put under preventive arrest merely to remove him from public life, they will have one reason more to despise the German Government. In what position must a Government be which cages the intellectual leaders of the country in order to stifle their significant opinions ?

“ In the same way Frau Doktor Rosa Luxemburg has long been undergoing preventive imprisonment without having committed the slightest criminal offence. She is in bad odour on account of her political leanings, and she is feared on account of her influence on the masses of the workers. That is why she is in prison. The Government does not appear to understand that it has in this way offended all the Social-Democratic women of Germany,

may, that by such an imprisonment it has dealt a blow to *the whole international workers' movement*. The Government does not appear to understand that it becomes, so to speak, a *Socialist duty* in France, England, Italy and Russia to wage war against such a Government.

“The treatment of the preventive prisoners is in itself revolting. In spite of his great age and precarious health, Mehring is kept in a wretched hole. Not until quite recently has it been possible to obtain his removal to the hospital ward of the Moabit Prison.

“About four weeks ago Frau Luxemburg was suddenly fetched out of her bed in the women's prison in Barnimstrasse, and taken to the Alexander Platz. There she was looked up *in a narrow cell where, as a rule, only prostitutes from the street are lodged*, whilst waiting to appear before the magistrate. The cell is only half the

size of the normal cells. All visits to Frau Luxemburg were refused; she was denied the newspapers, which she was allowed to take in Barnimstrasse; even her doctor was prohibited from attending her. The food was absolutely uneatable, so that she had to have her meals fetched from the neighbourhood, and to pay very dearly for them. And when one bears in mind her feeble health, it will be understood that only her extraordinary energy sustains her. One of her best friends writes on this subject to one of my colleagues: 'Her condition in prison is a direct menace to her life.' A moment before this sitting began, I was informed that Frau Luxemburg had suddenly been transferred from this prison to Wromke, in the province of Posen—so to the penalty of imprisonment exile has now been added. That is how preventive arrest serves the purposes of the military

reactionaries against the Socialist opposition of the country !

“In the same way the young Socialist movement is persecuted. The military command for Brandenburg forbade Comrade Käthe Duncker to carry on any of her usual activities amongst young workers on pain of preventive imprisonment. Comrade Duncker demanded an explanation of the legal authority for this prohibition, and wrote on this occasion : ‘I may add that the order is clearly the result of incorrect information. Amongst young workers I deal chiefly with scientific questions, which fall within the spheres of political and economic science. It is incomprehensible how such activity should be able to menace the general safety. By my lectures and my courses I have earned a part of the living of myself and my three children, and I am all the less able to do without this income as my



husband has been on military service since August of last year.'

"There we see how, on account of some wretched denunciation or other, a soldier's wife has been deprived of the possibility of earning a living for herself and her children by means of intellectual work!

"Two girls of eighteen were arrested at Berlin, on June 27, because they had distributed printed appeals to women workers to assemble in masses in the Potsdamer Platz, to protest against the trial of Liebknecht. For three and a half months these girls were kept under preventive arrest. A letter from one of them shows on the one hand in what physical and moral danger they were there, and on the other what moral elevation they derived from the study of Socialist philosophy. The girl writes: 'The fourth of the women was *a prostitute who was still under medical observation*;

she said that she wanted to begin a new and honourable life. I was not able to feel moral indignation. Her moral and intellectual inferiority finds excuse in her descent, education and previous life. Her parents were lunatics; the father is dead, the mother in an asylum. She herself was brought up in a children's home. Repeatedly she had to be brought up under restraint, several times in a reformatory, finally in prison or under arrest, subject to inspection. She was choleric and nervous; for the sake of peace we took care to say nothing, even when she told us about her past in the most brazen terms. We adopted precautionary measures when we used *the wash-basin we had in common*; this offended her and led to a quarrel that made this common life, which the whole time had been painful, absolutely unbearable. After eight days she left us and we felt much relieved.'

“ These lines from the letter of a working woman of eighteen are a cultural document. They are a splendid testimony to the high value of the Socialist upbringing of the proletariat, but also a witness to the infamy of the terrorism which in this way tramples under foot even the moral feelings of young girls. Preventive imprisonment is a moral danger for decent young women, for through the windows there they are forced to hear obnoxious conversations carried on between hardened offenders serving their time. The young woman already quoted writes : ‘ As most of the prisoners were prostitutes, the nature of these conversations was torture to any one who had not lost all sense of shame, all sense of purity, and in whom all respect for human worth was not stifled and extinguished. To the pain of having to witness so much depravity and degradation, which under other

circumstances might have been avoided, there was now added disgust.'

"Thus writes a working woman of eighteen. For months these two girls and their many comrades in misfortune were exposed to such an atmosphere. Our language is too poor to scourge such infamy as it merits. *We demand protection against such preventive imprisonment, which in reality is an imprisonment in filth (Schutz vor dieser Schutzhaft, welche eine Schmutzhaft ist).*

"If the Berlin Prefect of Police as an official is capable of blushing, he must do so before these Berlin working women. For eight days the young girl already referred to was prevented from informing her mother about her arrest. She was told that they would convey the news, but this was not done. And this girl contributed to the support of her mother and a little sister. In consequence of

her arrest she lost her place : for two years her father has been at the front and has been wounded. By way of thanks his daughter is insulted behind his back.

“ After being released on the 11th of this month (October 1916), the girl was present at a meeting in her Young Women’s Club, where nothing was transacted except business matters, elections and the like. She was summoned by the police, and a superintendent declared that her presence at the meeting was a piece of unheard-of impudence, after she had so recently been released. She was threatened with more preventive imprisonment until the end of the war if she was again present at a public political meeting. She replied that the *Society for Youthful Education* was not a political society, and that the meeting had been neither public nor political. Thereupon the superintendent overwhelmed her with invective and threatened

to arrest her on the spot if she said another word.

“There we have the arbitrariness of the police in all its splendour !

“There we see how, in this country which is promised a new *régime* by which the way will be open to all talent, the child of a working man is treated who with firm will tries to force her way through all obstacles to enlightenment and culture. By these means a systematic attempt is made to extinguish every spark of independence. That is why members of the Social-Democratic Party who venture any opposition are arrested ! By removing all those capable of leading this opposition it is imagined that the serpent's head will be crushed. The Government has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing.”

Dittmann enumerates many other victims of military oppression. In the *Kluers*

*case* it is an editor who, on February 5, was said to have delivered a lecture at a meeting of young people at Neu-Kölln—he was able to prove that he had not been there. He was the victim of a false denunciation. He was further charged with *intending* to publish a proclamation against the Social-Democratic party leaders who were faithful to the Government; this too was false. For mere trifles—most of them absolute untruths—he was kept in prison under the Preventive Arrest Law. So cruel were the authorities that when his wife was lying on her deathbed and asked to see him, the decision in the case was *delayed* so long—that the *refusal* of his request *could be justified by the fact that his wife was already buried.*”

At this point Herr Helfferich interjects :  
 “The Kluers were at variance with each other. The wife’s wish to meet her husband therefore only (!!) meant a wish

to be reconciled to him on her death-bed ! ”

A splendid minister !

The son, who is a soldier and who had got leave to be present at his mother's funeral, was not allowed to meet his father either. This new request was only dealt with when the son's leave was up. And so on.

In the provinces there are, of course, the same goings on as in Berlin. At Danzig the military command recommends preventive imprisonment for Socialist speakers who express themselves against the high prices of food.

Sauerbrey, the secretary of a society at Elberfeld-Barmen, was charged with having distributed an appeal. He was put under preventive arrest and was allowed to write letters to his family which were not sent on. After three weeks he demanded to be tried and threatened a



hunger-strike unless he was brought before a legally constituted court.

“ For two days he refused to take food : this had some effect. He was taken to the law courts and *charged with high treason and instigation to rebellion*, but the charge was soon dropped. Sauerbrey was *acquitted*—but good care was taken not to let him go. He was again put in prison. Next day he was *called up for military service*. It is true he had been rejected because he lacked several small bones in his left hand. But this is the typical Danzig method : ‘ preventive imprisonment, military service.’ He received the call to the colours at once, was given only an hour’s time to make his preparations under the eyes of a soldier; he was not even permitted after his long imprisonment to visit his children. He is now being drilled in his barracks before being sent to the front.

“This is not an isolated case,” says Dittmann; “I could enumerate many like it. In the seventh army command politicians who are in bad odour are often sent into the army. The division at once receives information from the governor-general at Münster that so-and-so has been attached to the army corps; documents to follow; these documents, of course, contain all sorts of unproved tales about espionage.”

Dittmann concludes his fulminating speech with a protest against the system of espionage and denunciation protected and supported by the State. His courageous speech is no doubt received with sympathy here and there—but *no public support*. The members of his party perceive too well how truly he has spoken, but do not dare to join in. They all know the danger lying in wait in the words *preventive imprisonment*.

*Preventive imprisonment*—this is the spectre which now frightens and curbs all the courageous men and women in Germany. It is perhaps *preventive imprisonment* which is the real reason for their *proud German unity*.

## CHAPTER X

### GOETHE'S WISE WORDS ABOUT BELGIUM

THIS is how Germany treats her own sons. How are we to expect, then, that she will treat her enemies? Is it not natural that the men who live in hell should become demons? And do we not perceive now to what an extent the aims of the Entente against German militarism are for the good of humanity—nay, in reality for the good of Germany herself? There seems to be no other remedy for Europe, no other salvation for Germany.

It does not seem so contradictory that the Powers who really have power should seek to save Germany by combating her. Even if the struggle should lead to the dissolution of the present artificial *imperial unity*—which, however, binds so many

non-German elements—perhaps even the Germans themselves would not think that so very much was lost. For her *unity* and *unanimity* Germany has already sacrificed so much of real greatness and happiness that many Germans would certainly be relieved to escape from what has become a strait-jacket.

In the year 1900 an author wrote in the South German paper *Die Jugend*, published at Munich—

“So ist die deutsche Einigkeit  
 Schon dreissig Jahr' am Leben :  
 Nun, denk' ich, wär' es an der Zeit  
 Sie wieder aufzuheben.”<sup>1</sup>

The South Germans would, according to the idea conveyed in the poem, preferably look after their own affairs without Prussian tutelage, possibly in conjunction with a reduced and purely German

<sup>1</sup> German unity has now existed thirty years, and now, I think, it is about time to make an end of it again (Translator's note).

Austria. *One feels sorry for this South Germany, which is the classical Germany, which has made a world-historical contribution to civilisation in literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music, which gave us Schiller, Goethe, Dürer, Holbein, Klinger, Wagner—that this, the true Germany, with ancestry, talent and a future, should tramp over the sandy deserts of barren Prussia, should waste its strength and time in drill, regulations, and colonial policy !”*

It is a pity for Germany that the system of Prussia should represent her. Now we obtain, to put it mildly, a false conception of the German character. This character is originally by no means one of violence, narrow-mindedness, and exaggerated self-esteem, although under the rod of the system it may seem to be all this. Through Prussianism the means has become the end, the sword has become a

national calling, the armour which should protect has become a shell which replaces real human skin. In this shell nerves, feelings, ideas, dreams, all true humanity perish—until the shell and the skeleton inside resemble an automatic toy, at the same time ridiculous and horrible, empty and terrible. Under Prussianism Germany has become the Skeleton-man of civilisation. It is death itself we are fighting against when we fight against the Prussian system, the Prussian type.

This type is crude and harsh, impudent and stupid. His psychology is the simplest possible, he knows only two methods of exerting influence : terrorism and untruth. He murders, tortures, and ravages to bow his enemies by fear. He flatters, promises, lies, and deceives in order to transform his enemies into "friends," which to him means slaves.

He signs a treaty with Belgium, by

which Belgium is pledged to defend her neutrality by force of arms. In the Hague Convention it is expressly stated that such armed resistance shall *not* by any one be regarded as a hostile act. But when Belgium acts thus, according to treaties and conventions confirmed and signed by Prussia, Belgium is regarded and treated as an *enemy*—nay, as a malefactor.

When this is not quite a success—when, in the deeper sense, it is a complete failure—the man of violence tries flattery. The Flemings are to be won over by the erection of a Flemish university, which he knows to be their desire. But he is seen through, his intention is too palpable, and if the idea of a Flemish university for a long time to come only remains an idea, this will be due to the system now attempted. From the hand of an enemy the Flemings will not receive the most precious gift. In his hand this gift has



received a stain; an odour of blood surrounds it, a shadow of shame obscures it.

The tempter discovers that he has not succeeded. He flames up in rage, he must punish those he recently sought to win over. He drags off first Flemish professors, then one-third of the population of Flanders, to German prisoners' camps and industrial prisons.

It has never struck the Prussian man of system that one can attain an object by humane consideration. It has never dawned on him that genuine goodwill is a great force. He does not recognise such ideas as kindness and truth; he does not perceive that, even if they were no good in themselves, they would nevertheless be the best means that a conqueror could make use of. It is *these* means which—in spite of imperfections and an intermixture of human weakness—have been the means of government

used by modern England in her colonial policy.

Finally, the Prussian system has never understood that there are objects which are not even worth striving after. As soon as it felt a desire for a thing it must obtain it. If it cannot be obtained in a friendly way, we are told that "necessity knows no law," and then the mailed fist appears, whilst the voice lies and makes itself as soft as possible. Necessity knows no law, and the "State" is in need every time it has cast a glance at the possessions of its neighbour. This system is the abolition of all morality. Robbery is, according to this system, the nature of the State, for what is a war of conquest but robbery? Murder and forgery are, according to this system, permissible means, for necessity knows no law. I defy any court of law—in a country where this system was *officially* and *logically*

cultivated—to have any *moral* right to pass sentence on a single burglar, bank thief, or hooligan.

I trust that no one will charge me with making no distinction between all kinds of violence, all kinds of war. There are holy wars—all wars of liberation, which are really worthy of the name, are holy wars. All democratic revolutions are holy wars, holy violence. By holy, then, I merely mean justified, in a certain measure necessary. But the deeds done in a war to *deprive* others of liberty, a war to *weaken, paralyse, destroy*, these will soon be considered just as much an offence on the part of a citizen, just as criminal an outrage, and just as punishable a transgression as similar acts within the limits of the national State. It will no longer do to make a distinction between national and international, to call a workman who steals a thief, but a minister who steals

a hero. The world will probably soon enough become a single State, however we may kick against it. All nations will be one single humanity, and what a German does to wrong a Belgian is just as immoral as what he does to wrong a German.

By Prussian means the world cannot be won, not even Belgium can be won and cowed. Prussia does not know the Belgian people, since Prussia seems to despise everything ideal, both knowledge and right and liberty, and to rely only on violence and oppression. It is a pity that the system should be maintained by Germans, for there was once a German who understood the Belgians. A South German, the most famous of all Germans up to the present and perhaps for all time. His name was Goethe, and he wrote a play about the struggle of the Belgians against another invader—not

Prussia. Herr von Bissing has probably no time to read Goethe, otherwise he would find how much the Governor-General of Belgium resembles the Spanish tyrant Alba. And he would also know that the Belgian people is not the soft clay he thinks he is moulding.

This is how Goethe's *Egmont* speaks of his fellow-countrymen the Belgians : " Ich kenne meine Landsleute. Es sind Männer, wert Gottes Boden zu betreten, ein jeder rund für sich, ein kleiner König, fest, rührig, fähig, treu, an alten Sitten hängend. Schwer ist's ihr Zutrauen zu verdienen, leicht zu erhalten. *Starr und fest!* Zu drücken sind sie, nicht zu unterdrücken."

(" I know my fellow-countrymen. They are men worthy to walk on God's earth, each a man in himself, a little king, firm, active, capable, faithful, devoted to old customs. To gain their confidence is

difficult, to keep it easy. *Obstinate and firm!* They can be oppressed, but not suppressed ! ”)

The tyrant Alba asks—

“ Wouldst thou be able to repeat all this in the presence of the King ? ”

Egmont replies—

“ All the worse, if his presence daunted me ! All the better for him, for his people, if he inspired me with courage, inspired me with confidence to say even more.”

Alba : “ What is useful, I can hear as well as he.”

Egmont : “ I should tell him : A shepherd can easily drive a flock of sheep before him, and the ox draws his plough without resistance ; but if thou wilt ride a noble horse, thou must overhear his thoughts, thou must not require anything unwise, nor unwisely require anything of him. Therefore the citizen desires to

retain his old constitution, to be ruled by his countrymen, because he knows how he is ruled, because he can hope of them unselfish sympathy with his lot."

Alba: "And ought not the ruler to have power to alter these old customs, and ought not just this to be his chief privilege? *What is permanent here in the world? And is it possible for a State institution to remain?* Must not, in the course of time, every circumstance be changed, and just for this reason an old constitution be the cause of a thousand inconveniences because it no longer corresponds to the present existence of the people? I fear that these old rights seem so pleasant, just because they provide creep-holes, where the cunning and powerful can hide and slink away, to the harm of the people and the whole."

Egmont: "And these arbitrary alterations, these despotic interventions on the

part of the highest power, are they not warnings that *one* thinks to do what the thousand ought not to do? He will make *himself alone free* to satisfy all his wishes and realise all his fancies. And if we now relied entirely on him, a good and wise king, can he answer for his successors, that none of them will rule us without consideration and clemency? *Who will then save us from absolute tyranny, if he sends us his servants and favourites, who without knowledge of the country and its needs carry on affairs, meet no resistance, but know themselves free from all responsibility?* ”

Alba : “ Nothing is more natural than that a king should think to rule by his own sovereign power, and prefer to entrust his orders to those who best understand and who wish to understand him, and who carry out his commands unconditionally.”



Egmont: "And it is just as natural that the citizen should wish to be ruled by him who has been born and brought up in the country, who has the same conception of right and wrong, and whom the citizen can regard as a fellow-countryman. . . ."

Alba: "The King will have his way. The King has, after mature deliberation, found what is for the good of the people; it cannot remain as hitherto. The King's intention is: to restrict the liberty of the people for the people's own good, to force on the people its welfare, if necessary, to sacrifice the injurious fellow-citizens, in order that the rest may enjoy quiet and find happiness under a wise government."

Egmont: "*Then he has decided what no prince ought to decide. He will weaken, oppress, destroy the people's power, soul, self-consciousness, in order to rule it with ease. He will destroy the very core of the*

*people's individuality, though he intends to make it happy. He will make the people a Nothing to make it afterwards a Something, something Different."*

This was how Egmont spoke, the Egmont of Belgium to the oppressor Alba. And this is how Egmont, the Egmont of Goethe speaks to-day to the new oppressor. It is the civilisation of Germany, her conscience, her humanity, which speaks to tyranny, of whatever nation it may be. In the figure of Goethe, in his language and with his genius, Germany still disapproves of the system which has been its ruin. The prætorian has become the master of Liberty and even of Cæsar. Emir-al-Omrah has snatched the sceptre from the caliph. The equerry has deposed the king. It is now the business of Germany's rightful master to regain authority in his own house.

From all the nations of the world, from

Belgium, Poland, Sleswick, Alsace, Serbia, the groan and lamentation arises unanimously : “ Down with the Prussian system ! ” And from the heart of Germany, from her noblest tongue, echoes the same cry : “ Down with the tyranny of militarism and bureaucracy ! ” In *Egmont*, Goethe has passed sentence on the oppressor of the people, whatever his nation !

THE END

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